



Parliamentary Question Database, Jan-Sept 2009

Member	Chamber	Date	Type	Question	Minister	Answer
Abbot, Diane	Commons	12.1.09	Written	*To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps his Department is taking to protect (a) Afghani people, (b) vulnerable populations in Afghanistan and (c) children in Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement.	Alexander, Douglas	Strengthened, transparent and accountable policing and justice systems are critical to protect Afghanistan's population from insecurity and criminality. The UK is working with the US and EU to reform the Afghan police and funding a bilateral mentoring programme in Helmand province. The UK provides over 50 experts for this purpose. We are working with the Government of Afghanistan (GoA) to strengthen both the formal justice sector (through the GoA's National Justice Programme) and the informal justice system. Improving people's access to justice and dispute resolution is a critical aspect of this work, through legal aid and training in legal and rights awareness. The UK's justice adviser in Helmand has for example established a Women and Children's Justice Group, helping vulnerable groups to have their rights better protected. Food insecurity in Afghanistan has been particularly acute in 2008-09 due to drought and to global food price increases. Around 4.5 million people are currently vulnerable to food scarcity with women, children, and the poorest disproportionately affected. In 2008 DFID provided the World Food Programme (WFP) with £11 million to respond to the food crisis. WFP deliver food on the basis of a Food Vulnerability Assessment which ranks districts in terms of food vulnerability and informs delivery priorities accordingly. Additional suffering is caused by mines and explosive remnants of war: it is estimated that 728 km ² still requires some form of clearance and over 4 million Afghans live in mine-affected areas. DFID funds the HALO trust (an expected £4.6 million in 2008-09) to undertake a demining programme, in order to return hazardous areas to productive use and reduce the threat to the population. DFID Afghanistan has developed a Gender Equality Action Plan to drive awareness and focus on gender issues within our development programme. The plan covers gender-disaggregated results monitoring, explicitly mapping staff and programme resources against gender objectives, and an internal skills development programme. A significant portion of our effort will be focused on building partnerships within the GoA and with other donors—particularly multilateral institutions—to increase their contribution to addressing gender inequality. DFID will lobby UNDP, the World Bank, and the Ministry of Agriculture to strengthen their approaches to gender issues.

Judd, Lord	Lords	22.1.09	Written	To ask Her Majesty's Government what are their plans for extending support for the role of women in civil society in Iraq.	Brett, Lord	The UK supports a wide range of organisations and projects to develop the role of women in civil society in Iraq, including supporting the Iraqi Ministry of Human Rights and Women. As part of this, the Department for International Development's (DfID) focus remains on the most vulnerable women through humanitarian contributions to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), International Organisation for Migration (IoM), UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). The Iraqi constitution includes provisions protecting the rights of women. The UK Government will continue to work with the Iraqi authorities to ensure these rights are protected. Officials at our embassy in Baghdad, the FCO and the right honourable Ann Clwyd MP, the PM's special envoy for human rights in Iraq, regularly raise women's rights with the Iraqi Government at all levels.
Drew, David	Commons	12.2.09	Written	To ask the Secretary of State for International Development with reference to the UK National Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolution 1325, what steps the Government is taking to ensure the needs of Afghan civil society, with particular reference to local and national women's organisations, are taken into account in the reconstruction of Afghanistan.	Rammell, Bill	I am aware of the difficult situation many women in Afghanistan still face. Our embassy officials regularly discuss women's rights with members of the Afghan government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and Afghan parliamentarians. The Government work to enhance the status of women in three main ways: through policy engagement with the Afghan government; through support for national programmes and services, which benefit women; and through bilateral programmes. Despite the challenges, progress has been made: over a third of children now in school are girls and we have committed over £35million to support the Afghan government's micro-finance programme, giving women in particular better access to finance. 27 per cent. of seats in the Lower House of the Afghan Parliament are held by women. Our main support is channelled through the Afghan government, since gender inequality is a deeply embedded and long-term problem which needs a strategic approach. We have worked, for example, with the government to ensure that gender equality is integrated into the Afghanistan National Development Strategy. We are giving £500,000 to support a five-year Women's Empowerment programme (2005-10), implemented by the NGO Womankind. The programme focuses on promoting women's equal participation in governance; building awareness of women's rights among civil society and policy makers; and on providing educational, health, community and psycho-social support to women affected by violence and conflict. Womankind implements its programmes through local Afghan women's NGO's, helping to build Afghan capacity. Since its establishment in 2002, we have given over £1.75 million to support the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), including £200,000 this year to support its 2009-10 Action Plan. The Commission is a cornerstone of Afghan civil society,

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						with over 500 staff working to improve respect for human rights across Afghanistan. A large part of the Commission's work focuses on women's rights, including documenting and tackling violence against women. The AIHRC now has representatives in Helmand province, who are helping support the new Women and Children's Justice group, established in Lashkar Gah in August 2008. Run by prominent female members of the community, the Group is developing and implementing practical programmes on the ground to support women and children's rights and justice issues. More information on progress against the UK's National Action Plan, in Afghanistan and elsewhere, can be found on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website, which is updated periodically: " http://www.fco.gov.uk/resources/en/pdf/unscr-1325-uk-action-plan ."
Drew, David	Commons	23.2.09	Written	To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when he plans to answer Question 246213, tabled by the hon. Member for Stroud on 17 December 2008, on UK National Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and Afghanistan.	Foster, Michael John	The parliamentary question referred to by my hon. Friend was transferred to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and answered on 12 February 2009, Official Report, column 2308-09W.
Swinson, Jo	Commons	23.2.09	Written	To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent steps he has taken to promote the inclusion of women in conflict resolution and peace building in Israel and Palestine as provided for under UN Security Council Resolution 1325; and if he will make a statement.	Rammell, Bill	In both international organisations and at local levels, the UK remains a leading supporter of women's roles in delivering sustainable peace and security. We led the call for the adoption of both UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and the follow on resolution UNSCR 1820 and continue to support the inclusion of language that reaffirms the importance of UNSCR 1325 in UN peacekeeping mandates. In Israel and Palestine, we have supported organisations working to promote women's roles in political processes and their ability to influence public policy.

Swinson, Jo	Commons	27.2.09	Written	To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the effect of (a) the resignation from the Iraqi government of its Minister for Women and (b) budgetary reductions of the Iraqi Ministry for Women on Iraq's ability to fulfil its responsibilities under UN Security Council Resolution 1325.	Rammell, Bill	We were disappointed to hear news of the resignation of Mrs. Nawal al-Samaraie although there apparently remains considerable uncertainty towards whether this resignation has been accepted by the Government of Iraq. We have always enjoyed excellent relations with Mrs. al-Samaraie and have offered our full support to the work of her ministry. Budgetary issues are clearly a matter for the government of Iraq but we understand that the Iraqi Ministry of Women's Affairs is a Ministry of State and does not have the same autonomy, or budget line, of a full Ministry under the Iraqi Government. The UK shall continue to work with the Government of Iraq to ensure that the rights of women as provided within the Iraqi constitution are upheld. The Iraqi Ministry of Human Rights also has responsibility towards upholding women's rights as will the National Human Rights Commission which was established through legislation passed in November 2008.
McCafferty, Chris	Commons	5.3.09	Written	To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what objectives his Department has set for outcomes from (a) the 53rd Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women and (b) the 42nd Session of the UN Commission on Population and Development.	Merron, Gillian	[holding answer 4 March 2009]: The Government's overall objective for the 53rd Session on the UN Commission on the Status of Women is to evaluate progress on gender equality internationally, identify challenges, set global standards and formulate concrete policies to promote gender equality and the advancement of women worldwide. This is particularly important in the current economic climate. Throughout the 53rd Commission on the Status of Women, the Government will also be working to promote discussion of this year's priority theme on the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, particularly in relation to the interrelated issues of care-giving and the gender pay gap. For the 42nd Session of the UN Commission on Population and Development the Government aims to ensure that the UN is effective in promoting the International Commission on Population and Development (ICPD) Platform of Action in order to improve the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women, girls, men and boys worldwide. In particular, during this Commission on Population and Development, the UK aims to: "highlight the importance of focusing, during Millennium Development Goal (MDG) processes in 2010, on the key contribution that MDG target 5b (on universal access to "reproductive health) makes to the achievement of not only MDG 5 but also goals pertaining to women's empowerment, poverty, child health and the environment;" "emphasise the need to re-invigorate the family planning agenda and to address unmet needs for family planning; and" "call attention to the value of and need for the full participation of all sectors-public, private and civil society-in processes and actions to achieve the ICPD goal of universal access to reproductive health by 2015."

Simpson, Keith	Commons	7.3.09	Written	<p>To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received on progress in the review of Shi'a Family Law in Afghanistan ordered by President Karzai; what discussions he has had with the government of Afghanistan on that matter; and if he will make a statement.</p>	Lewis, Ivan	<p>We, along with other international partners, made our concerns about the Shia Personal Status Law clear to the Afghan Government at a senior level. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister raised the issue with President Karzai. We welcomed President Karzai's announcement on 27 April 2009 that the law would be changed to bring it in line with the Afghan Constitution, which guarantees equal rights for women, and the international treaties to which Afghanistan is a party. On 20 June 2009, the Minister of Justice met with female representatives of the Afghan Parliament and civil society and told them that his Ministry has now amended the Law. The amendments were made following written recommendations by Afghan civil society (the Afghan Women's Network), Katib university and moderate Ulema (religious scholars). We understand the amendments made by the Afghan Ministry of Justice have added around 60 articles and removed around 10 from the Law. Language was also added to clarify the meaning of certain articles. The amended draft was viewed by the above female representatives as broadly 'pro women', and contentious articles, including the provision appearing to legalise rape, had been removed. The Law is also being reviewed by the Supreme Court. President Karzai has indicated that the Law will next be sent back to the Afghan Parliament for approval (in time for the new session of Parliament, beginning 20 July 2009). The Law continues to cause controversy on both sides—some religiously conservative Ulema are still lobbying the President to pass the original draft, parts of which the international community and many Afghans deemed unacceptable. The outcome is still uncertain, therefore we, along with our international partners and Afghan civil society, will continue to follow the passage of the Law closely. We will lobby the Afghan Government whenever appropriate, to help ensure the final Law respects women's rights and does not undo progress made since 2001.</p>
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Hylton, Lord	Lords	18.3.09	Written	To ask Her Majesty's Government whether progress has been made in implementing United Nations Security Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security; and, if so, under what main headings.	Malloch Brown, Lord	The implementation of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 is a global challenge and it is not possible to provide an exhaustive list of progress made. Nationally, the UK's national action plan on UNSCR 1325 provides the framework for domestic activity and gives impetus to our global efforts that include: Increased representation of women at decision-making levels in conflict institutions—the UK has called for progress in the process of appointing women to senior posts in the UN. The UN Secretary General now routinely insists that there are female candidates on every shortlist for senior appointments in UN peacekeeping missions and headquarters roles. Gender perspectives included as part of peacekeeping operations—the UK consistently requests that women's protection issues and their role in conflict resolution is addressed in mandates for UN peacekeeping missions. Gender advisers or gender focal points are now present in UN-led peacekeeping missions. Training on protection, rights and needs of women in conflict—the UK has run training and awareness raising events for its conflict prevention officers, strategy managers and staff in its UN mission in New York. The UK provides peace support operations (PSO) training to peacekeepers and include aspects of UNSCR 1325, as they are covered in UK PSO doctrine and training. Protection of women in conflict affected areas—the adoption of UNSCR 1820 in June 2008 was a significant step forward in strengthening previous calls to address the scourge of widespread sexual violence in conflict-affected situations. The UK was a key driver behind the design and passage of this resolution. The Government also work on the ground in conflict and post conflict areas to further the aims of UNSCR1325.
Lidington, David	Commons	23.3.09	Written	To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the government of Iraq on women's rights in Iraq; and if he will make a statement.	Rammell, Bill	Our officials in Baghdad regularly meet with staff from the office of the Minister for Women's Affairs and Ministry of Human Rights. We are closely monitoring the work of the acting Minister for Women's Affairs. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Human Rights in Iraq also raised the situation of women with senior members of the government of Iraq during a visit on 1 March 2009.

Sarwar, Mohammad	Commons	26.3.09	Written	To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department has taken to support the achievement of the objectives of the UN Resolution 1820 on Women and peace and security.	Merron, Gillian	Since the passage of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1820 in June 2008, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) has taken several positive steps toward supporting moves to implement the objectives of the UNSCR, including: "Supporting the development and strengthening of the capacities of national institutions, in particular judicial and health systems and local civil society networks in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Afghanistan, in order to provide assistance to victims of sexual violence." "Working to mainstream the provisions of UNSCR 1820 into the mandates of UN peacekeeping missions, such as UNSCR 1861 for Chad/Central African Republic, and highlighting the importance of gender considerations in the training that peacekeepers receive, including from UK supported training." "Working for greater levels of representation of women in the mediation services provided by the UN and among deployed peacekeeping troop contingents." "Highlighting the importance of conduct and discipline of peacekeepers in committees such as the C-34 Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations and the UN Security Council, including the provision of UK funding to the UN Conduct and Discipline unit." "We are looking forward to the UN Secretary-General's report on the implementation of this resolution on 30 June 2009 and the recommendations it contains. We will consider them carefully in relation to our own National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325.
Rosindell, Andrew	Commons	30.6.09	Written	To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much his Department spent on promoting International Women's Day 2009.	Foster, Michael John	To mark International Women's Day, the Department for International Development (DFID) promoted work on violence against women, a policy issue of major concern to the UK Government and civil society partners in the UK and developing countries. Former Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Mr. Ivan Lewis) hosted an exhibit commissioned by the non-governmental organisation Action Aid as part of a wider display of information in DFID's London office on the issue of violence against women. This was accompanied by a series of lunchtime films on gender issues shown during the week of 9 March. Non-staff costs incurred by these activities came to less than £200. In addition, some DFID country offices used the occasion of International Women's Day to highlight work on gender issues in support of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). For example, in Sierra Leone, DFID committed £16,000 to support awareness-raising activities on the issue of maternal mortality during February and March.

Moore, Michael	Commons	30.6.09	Written	To ask the Secretary of State for International Development pursuant to the answer of 15 June 2009, Official Report, column 1W, on United Nations: females, what proposals his Department has put forward for the (a) remit and (b) leadership of a United Nations Agency for Women; and if he will make a statement.	Thomas, Gareth	The UK Government are arguing for the creation of a single powerful agency for women, merging existing bodies, with a strong visible leader.
Swinson, Jo	Commons	2.7.09	Written	(2) what recent reports his Department has received of violent attacks on female journalists in Afghanistan.	Lewis, Ivan	We are aware that attacks against female journalists have taken place, for example the attack on Zakia Zaki, who ran the private radio station Peace Radio. She was killed by multiple gunmen in her home north of Kabul, in the central province of Parwan, on 5 June 2007. We deplore attacks on any journalist—male or female—and supported the joint EU-Norway declaration on freedom of expression made on 16 April 2009: " http://www.delafg.ec.europa.eu/en/downloadable_documents/Nov_2008/Press_Release/DFE_16apr09.pdf " We welcome the huge growth in independent Afghan media since 2001, but, as the declaration states, we are concerned about evidence of a gradual deterioration of the situation regarding freedom of expression, including the growing intimidation and violence targeting Afghan journalists, and challenges to the independence of the media. If the Afghan Government were to enact the new Media Law, already passed by the Lower House of the Afghan Parliament, it would do much to help ensure respect for freedom of expression, particularly in the run up to the elections this August. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has raised this issue with President Karzai and we will continue to lobby the Afghan Government to pass the law. Strengthening the rule of law is also essential to protecting individuals, including journalists, from violence and intimidation. But the challenges are long-term and significant. We continue to support the Afghan authorities in developing an effective police force, improving access to justice and strengthening the formal justice system's ability to prosecute offenders and tackle corruption. In 2008-09, the UK allocated £29 million to strengthen Afghan interdiction and law enforcement capacity.

Milton, Anne	Commons	7.7.09	Written	To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer of 21 May 2009, Official Report, column 1496W, on Afghanistan: females, what reports he has received on the (a) composition, (b) mandate and (c) method of operation of the drafting committee established by the Afghan Ministry of Justice to re-examine certain provisions of the Shi'a Family Law; and if he will make a statement.	Lewis, Ivan	We, along with other international partners, made our concerns about the Shia Personal Status Law clear to the Afghan Government at a senior level. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister raised the issue with President Karzai. We welcomed President Karzai's announcement on 27 April 2009 that the law would be changed to bring it in line with the Afghan Constitution, which guarantees equal rights for women, and the international treaties to which Afghanistan is a party. On 20 June 2009, the Minister of Justice met with female representatives of the Afghan Parliament and civil society and told them that his Ministry has now amended the Law. The amendments were made following written recommendations by Afghan civil society (the Afghan Women's Network), Katib university and moderate Ulema (religious scholars). We understand the amendments made by the Afghan Ministry of Justice have added around 60 articles and removed around 10 from the Law. Language was also added to clarify the meaning of certain articles. The amended draft was viewed by the above female representatives as broadly 'pro women', and contentious articles, including the provision appearing to legalise rape, had been removed. The Law is also being reviewed by the Supreme Court. President Karzai has indicated that the Law will next be sent back to the Afghan Parliament for approval (in time for the new session of Parliament, beginning 20 July 2009). The Law continues to cause controversy on both sides—some religiously conservative Ulema are still lobbying the President to pass the original draft, parts of which the international community and many Afghans deemed unacceptable. The outcome is still uncertain, therefore we, along with our international partners and Afghan civil society, will continue to follow the passage of the Law closely. We will lobby the Afghan Government whenever appropriate, to help ensure the final Law respects women's rights and does not undo progress made since 2001.
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Curtis-Thomas, Claire	Commons	9.7.09	Written	To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his Pakistani counterpart on the sexual abuse of women in Pakistan.	Lewis, Ivan	My hon. Friend, the former Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Gillian Merron, visited Pakistan in February 2009 and met Sherry Rehman, Pakistan's former Minister for Women. She raised concerns about violence against women in the face of growing violent extremism in Pakistan and also expressed UK support to help the Government of Pakistan counter the impact of violent extremism on women's rights. Additionally, she stressed the need to take forward the recommendations made by the EU Election Observation Mission in 2008 to promote women's participation in Pakistan's parliament and public life. Our high commission in Islamabad works closely with the EU Special Representative and Human Rights Working Group of the EU member states in Pakistan to promote women's rights in Pakistan. With the EU, we have issued biannual demarches calling on the Government of Pakistan to review discriminatory legislation and fully implement its obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Our high commission also supports programme and project work designed to strengthen the capacity of civil society to promote women's rights, help the Government of Pakistan achieve the Millennium Development Goals and take forward the recommendations made by the EU Election Observation Mission after Pakistan's elections in February 2008.
Moore, Michael	Commons	9.7.09	Written	To ask the Secretary of State for International Development pursuant to the answer of 15 June 2009, Official Report, column 1W, on United Nations: females, what funding to support the establishment of a United Nations Agency for Women his Department has allocated; over what time period; and if he will make a statement.	Thomas, Gareth	The Department for International Development (DFID) will play a full role in ensuring that the new UN Agency for Women is adequately resourced, we will urge others to do the same. The new White Paper on International Development: Building Our Common Future sets out our plans to support the creation of the new agency. Once the new agency is established, DFID will support fundraising efforts, and show leadership by generous core funding—at least doubling our current levels of support for UNIFEM. We will also support the new agency with funding at country level.
Opik, Lembit	Commons	15.7.09	Written	To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether his Department has had discussions with the Indian government on sexual violence against	Lewis, Ivan	The Foreign and Commonwealth Office have not discussed sexual violence against Dalit women directly with the Indian Government in the last 12 months. However, UK officials in New Delhi have actively participated in the ongoing EU dialogue with the Indian authorities on minority rights, including Dalit related issues.

				Dalit women in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement.		
Ellwood, Tobias	Commons	20.7.09	Written	To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to the Answer of 16 July 2009, Official Report, column 675W, on Afghanistan: theme parks, what his estimate is of the number of people who have used the Park for Women in Lashkar each week since its establishment; and what recent assessment he has made of the condition of the park.	DFID	Pending
Rosindell, Andrew	Commons	21.7.09	Written	To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, how much his Department plans to spend on promoting International Women's Day 2010.	DFID	Pending
Rosindell, Andrew	Commons	21.7.09	Written	To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, how much his Department spent promoting women's rights in developing countries in each of the last 12 months.	DFID	Pending

Keeble, Sally	Commons	10.9.09	Written	To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what representations he has made to the Sudanese government on the imprisonment of Lubana al-Hussein and the punishment of women arrested with her for wearing trousers.	FCO	Pending
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